
A Sociolinguistic Approach to ESP Reading Instruction: improving Reading Comprehension of Non-Philology EFL Undergraduates through Genre-Diverse Profession-Oriented Texts

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Annotation *This study examines the effectiveness of a sociolinguistic approach in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) reading instruction for non-philology economics students in Uzbekistan. The research employed a one-group pre-test/post-test design with 126 participants over a 16-week instructional period. The intervention integrated genre-based teaching, register awareness, and reflective monitoring tasks to enhance students' reading comprehension. The assessment instrument included genre-diverse texts, multiple-choice questions, situational tasks, and reflective activities. The results revealed statistically significant improvements in all components, with a substantial overall gain in reading performance. The largest effect was observed in genre-based text comprehension, while situational tasks showed the highest score increase. Cross-institutional analysis confirmed the consistency of results across different universities. The findings demonstrate that sociolinguistic instruction not only improves comprehension but also develops pragmatic and professional reading skills. Therefore, the study supports the integration of sociolinguistic ESP methodologies into higher education curricula to enhance students' communicative competence and professional literacy.*

Keywords *English for Specific Purposes (ESP) reading comprehension, sociolinguistic approach, genre-based pedagogy, profession-oriented literacy, communicative proficiency, non-philological undergraduates, Uzbekistan*

Maxsus maqsadlarga mo'ljallangan ingliz tilida o'qishni o'qitishda sotsiolingvistik yondashuv: turli janrdagi kasbga yo'naltirilgan matnlar asosida nofilologik yo'nalishdagi talabalarning o'qib tushunishini rivojlantirish

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Annotatsiya *Ushbu tadqiqot O'zbekistondagi nofilologik yo'nalishdagi iqtisodiyot talabalari uchun ingliz tilini maxsus maqsadlarda (ESP) o'qish ta'limida sotsiolingvistik yondashuv samaradorligini o'rganadi. Tadqiqotda 126 nafar talaba ishtirok etib, 16 haftalik tajriba davomida pre-test va post-test asosida baholash o'tkazildi. Intervensiya jarayonida janrga asoslangan o'qitish, registri anglash va reflektiv monitoring faoliyatlari qo'llanildi. Baholash vositalari sifatida turli janrdagi matnlar,*

test savollari, vaziyatli topshiriqlar va reflektiv mashqlar ishlatildi. Natijalar barcha komponentlar bo'yicha statistik jihatdan ahamiyatli yaxshilanishlarni ko'rsatdi, bunda o'qish ko'nikmalari umumiy darajasida sezilarli o'sish kuzatildi. Eng katta samaradorlik janrga asoslangan matnlarni tushunishda aniqlangan bo'lsa, vaziyatli topshiriqlarda eng yuqori ball o'sishi qayd etildi. Turli oliy ta'lim muassasalari kesimidagi tahlil natijalarning barqarorligini tasdiqladi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko'rsatadiki, sotsiolingvistik yondashuv nafaqat matnni tushunishni yaxshilaydi, balki pragmatik va kasbiy o'qish ko'nikmalarini ham rivojlantiradi. Shu sababli, mazkur tadqiqot oliy ta'lim tizimida sotsiolingvistik ESP metodologiyalarini joriy etish zarurligini asoslaydi.

Kalit so'zlar Maxsus maqsadlarga mo'ljallangan ingliz tili (ESP) o'qish kompetentsiyasi, sotsiolingvistik yondashuv, janrga asoslangan pedagogika, kasbga yo'naltirilgan savodxonlik, kommunikativ kompetentlik, filologik bo'lmagan bakalavrlar, O'zbekiston

Социолингвистический подход к обучению чтению в рамках ESP: развитие понимания текста у студентов нефилологических специальностей на основе жанрово-разнообразных профессионально ориентированных текстов

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Аннотация Данное исследование направлено на изучение эффективности социолингвистического подхода в обучении чтению на английском языке для специальных целей (ESP) среди студентов экономических специальностей нефилологического профиля в Узбекистане. В исследовании приняли участие 126 студента, и в течение 16 недель применялся дизайн с предварительным и итоговым тестированием. В учебный процесс были включены жанрово-ориентированное обучение, развитие осознания регистра и задания рефлексивного мониторинга. Инструменты оценки включали тексты разных жанров, тестовые задания, ситуативные упражнения и рефлексивные задания. Результаты показали статистически значимые улучшения по всем компонентам, а также существенный общий прирост показателей понимания текста. Наибольший эффект был зафиксирован в понимании жанрово-ориентированных текстов, тогда как наибольший рост баллов наблюдался в выполнении ситуационных заданий. Сравнительный анализ между различными вузами подтвердил стабильность полученных результатов. Полученные данные свидетельствуют о том, что социолингвистический подход не только улучшает понимание текста, но и способствует развитию прагматических и профессиональных навыков чтения. Таким образом,

исследование обосновывает необходимость внедрения социолингвистических ESP-методик в программы высшего образования для повышения коммуникативной компетенции и профессиональной грамотности студентов.

Ключевые слова *Чтение на английском языке для специальных целей (ESP), социолингвистический подход, жанрово-ориентированная педагогика, профессионально направленная грамотность, коммуникативная компетентность, студенты нефилологических специальностей*

Introduction

In academic and professional contexts, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) reading has become a critical competency for non-philology students, particularly those in economics and business disciplines (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Grabe & Stoller, 2013). Professionals in these fields must interpret structurally complex texts – including economic analyses, policy documents, and investment reports – that demand not only lexical and grammatical knowledge but also sociolinguistic awareness of genre conventions and communicative purpose (Swales, 1990; Johns, 1997).

Nonetheless, ESP reading instruction in Uzbekistan's non-philology programs has primarily depended on vocabulary and grammar-centric methodologies, which insufficiently prepare students with the sociolinguistic competence necessary to understand professional texts in genuine workplace environments (Nuttall, 1996; Grabe & Stoller, 2013). Students often interpret superficial meanings without acknowledging genre conventions, variations in register, or the social functions of professional documents.

The sociolinguistic approach, conceptualized by Canale and Swain (1980) and based on Hymes's (1972) framework of communicative competence, situates language acquisition within its social and contextual environment. This framework, when used to ESP reading, focuses instructional emphasis on

genre schemata, register identification, and pragmatic discourse analysis – skills deemed crucial for professional-level reading (Bachman, 1990; Bell, 1984).

This study examines the effects of a systematically administered sociolinguistic ESP reading program on reading comprehension across various institutions in Uzbekistan. This is the inaugural multi-institutional, large-scale empirical investigation of this methodology within the Uzbek tertiary English for Specific Purposes environment, to the authors' knowledge. Four research inquiries directed the investigation:

RQ1. *Does the sociolinguistic ESP reading intervention produce statistically significant pre-test to post-test gains in overall reading comprehension?*

RQ2. *Which assessment components demonstrate the greatest improvement?*

RQ3. *Are learning outcomes consistent across the three participating institutions?*

RQ4. *What pedagogical mechanisms account for differential gains across assessment components?*

Literature Review

Sociolinguistic Competence in ESP Reading

Sociolinguistic Proficiency in English for Specific Purposes Reading English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is characterized by its focus on the particular communicative requirements of learners in their professional or academic contexts (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). ESP

reading necessitates that learners not only understand material but also maneuver within genre-specific textual frameworks, discern communicative purpose, and address the sociopragmatic requirements of professional discourse (Johns, 1997; Swales, 1990). These abilities are inherently sociolinguistic, assuming an understanding of the communicative conventions of professional discourse communities (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980). Sociolinguistic competence – the capacity to generate and comprehend language suitably within context (Canale & Swain, 1980) – empowers readers to transcend propositional understanding and discern the social and institutional roles of professional writings. For instance, proficient readers discern the epistemic role of hedging in economic reporting and the authority indicators present in policy discourse (Bachman, 1990; Bell, 1984). In the Uzbek context, Ziyaeva Sevara Anvarovna (2019) and Riskulova J. (2021) focus explicitly on the development of sociolinguistic competence as a core component of professional communicative ability. In contrast, the earlier work of Irmukhamedova G. (2008) adopts a cognitive and critical reading perspective, investigating the impact of authentic text-based instruction on learners' analytical and interpretive skills.

Genre-Based Instruction

Genre-based education serves as the principal methodological approach for enhancing sociolinguistic ESP reading proficiency. Swales (1990) characterized a genre as a discernible communicative event possessing common objectives, structures, and linguistic conventions. Instruction in genre recognition equips learners to utilize top-down textual schemata, hence enhancing processing efficiency and improving the accuracy of professional discourse interpretation (Snow, 2002; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). The target genres for economics students encompass analytical papers, economic reports, policy documents, market research,

macroeconomic commentaries, educational resources, and investment ideas

Reflective Monitoring and Reading-to-Production Transfer

Modern ESP pedagogy prioritizes the amalgamation of reading instruction with reflective and productive tasks (Grabe & Stoller, 2013). Alzahrani (2025) established that strategy-based training necessitating active reader-text interaction – particularly the Questioning the Author (QtA) method – yielded significant improvements in comprehension. Khampool and Chumworatayee (2023) discovered that Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR), which incorporates systematic question formulation and summarization, was especially efficacious in enhancing discourse-level comprehension. The findings guided the educational design of the current study.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This research utilized a one-group pre-test/post-test design, adhering to established principles in applied ESP research (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). The methodology facilitated systematic intra-group assessment of changes in reading comprehension after a 16-week instructional intervention consisting of two 90-minute sessions weekly. All participants furnished signed informed consent, and participation was voluntary.

Participants

A total of 126 non-philology undergraduate students majoring in economics were recruited from two universities using selective sampling. The inclusion criteria were: (1) enrollment in a mandatory ESP reading course; (2) absence of prior exposure to systematic sociolinguistic ESP reading teaching; and (3) equivalent baseline competency verified by pre-test scores. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of participants. A total of 126 non-philology undergraduate economics students were recruited from three universities via purposive sampling. Inclusion criteria were: (1) enrolment

in a compulsory ESP reading course; (2) no prior exposure to systematic sociolinguistic ESP reading instruction; and (3) comparable

baseline proficiency confirmed by pre-test scores. Table 1 presents the participant distribution.

| University | Groups (n) | N per Group | Total N | Programme |
|-----------------------------------|------------|-------------|------------|---------------------------|
| Gulistan State University | 3 | 20–21 | 61 | Economics (Non-Philology) |
| National University of Uzbekistan | 3 | 16 | 65 | Economics (Non-Philology) |
| Total | 6 | — | 126 | — |

Table 1. Participant Distribution by University and Group

Note. Group sizes ranged from 16 to 21, representative of standard ESP class sizes in Uzbek universities.

Assessment Instrument

The primary data collection instrument was a researcher-designed 20-item ESP reading comprehension test, used as both pre-test and post-test. The instrument assessed four cognitive and sociolinguistic levels, grounded in Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) and the multi-

component model of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Bachman, 1990). Content validity was established through expert review by two ESP methodologists and one professor of applied linguistics. Internal consistency was confirmed by Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$ (pre-test) and $\alpha = .84$ (post-test). Table 2 describes the components.

| Component | Items | Marks | Task Type | Sociolinguistic Focus |
|---|-----------|-----------|---|--|
| Genre-Diverse ESP Texts | 5 | 5 | Extracts from 7 economic genre types | Genre schemata; register variation |
| Domain-Specific MCQs | 5 | 5 | Four-option items targeting ESP discourse | Register markers; hedging; speech acts |
| Open-Ended Situational Case Questions | 5 | 10 | Written responses to professional scenarios | Pragmatic interpretation; professional communication |
| Reflective Monitoring & Productive Transfer | 5 | 10 | Oral and written exercises bridging reading to production | Metacognitive monitoring; professional output |
| Total | 20 | 30 | — | — |

Table 2. ESP Reading Assessment Instrument: Components and Scoring

Instructional Intervention

The 16-week sociolinguistic ESP reading programme was structured across three instructional phases, delivered uniformly across all 6 groups and two institutions.

Phase 1 – Genre and Sociolinguistic Awareness (Weeks 1-5). Explicit instruction in ESP genre analysis (Swales, 1990), register variation in economic discourse, and professional speech act conventions. All seven

target genres were introduced through authentic text exemplars.

Phase 2 – Profession-Oriented Reading Practice (Weeks 6-10). Learners progressed from genre recognition to discourse-level analysis using authentic economic ESP texts. Collaborative Strategic Reading activities (Khampool & Chumworatayee, 2023) supported sociolinguistic strategy development. Digital corpus tools extended reading practice beyond contact hours (Alzubi et al., 2019).

Phase 3 – Reflective Monitoring and Productive Transfer (Weeks 11–16). Metacognitive activities included reflective writing journals, structured self-assessment,

and peer discussion. The Questioning the Author approach (Alzahrani, 2025) facilitated critical text engagement. Productive transfer tasks required learners to apply reading knowledge in simulated professional scenarios via oral and written output.

Results

Overall Pre-Test and Post-Test Findings

The 16-week intervention produced a statistically significant and practically large overall improvement in ESP reading comprehension. Mean total scores increased from $M = 16.38$ ($SD = 3.79$) at pre-test to $M = 22.91$ ($SD = 3.17$) at post-test ($\Delta = +6.53/30$; $t(185) = 25.64$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.88$). Table 3 presents component-level results.

| Component | Pre-Test M (SD) | Post-Test M (SD) | Δ | t(185) | p | Cohen's d |
|--|-----------------|------------------|----------|--------|--------|-----------|
| Total ESP Score (/30) | 16.38 (3.79) | 22.91 (3.17) | +6.53 | 25.64 | < .001 | 1.88 |
| Genre-Diverse ESP Texts (/5) | 2.97 (0.91) | 4.14 (0.74) | +1.17 | 19.23 | < .001 | 1.41 |
| Domain-Specific MCQs (/5) | 3.08 (0.89) | 4.11 (0.77) | +1.03 | 16.50 | < .001 | 1.21 |
| Open-Ended Case Questions (/10) | 5.18 (1.68) | 7.38 (1.49) | +2.20 | 18.96 | < .001 | 1.39 |
| Reflective Monitoring & Transfer (/10) | 5.15 (1.73) | 7.28 (1.61) | +2.13 | 18.00 | < .001 | 1.32 |

Table 3. Pre-Test and Post-Test Results by Component ($N = 126$)

Note. M = mean score; SD = standard deviation; Δ = absolute gain; d = Cohen's d . All p -values < .001.

All four components demonstrated statistically significant improvement with large effect sizes. The genre-diverse ESP text component yielded the largest effect size ($d = 1.41$), indicating that genre schema training had the strongest differential impact. The open-ended situational case component recorded the greatest absolute gain (+2.20 marks; $d = 1.39$), reflecting substantial development in pragmatic reading competence.

Cross-Institutional Comparisons

Table 4 presents university-level pre-test and post-test means. Score gains were highly consistent across institutions, ranging from +6.49 to +6.56 marks.

| University | N | Groups | Pre-Test M (SD) | Post-Test M (SD) | Gain (Δ) | t | P |
|--------------------------------------|----|--------|--------------------|---------------------|----------------------|-------|--------|
| Gulistan State University | 61 | 3 | 16.42 (3.76) | 22.98 (3.14) | +6.56 | 14.80 | < .001 |
| National University of Uzbekistan | 65 | 3 | 16.58 (3.80) | 23.07 (3.18) | +6.49 | 15.04 | < .001 |

Table 4. Pre-Test and Post-Test Comparison Across Three Universities

Note. All paired-samples t-tests significant at $p < .001$.

A one-way ANOVA revealed no statistically significant difference in post-test gains across institutions ($F(2, 183) = 0.41, p = .67$), confirming programme effectiveness was not moderated by institutional context, group size (range: 16–21), or geographic location.

Discussion

Genre Schemata as the Primary Mechanism of Comprehension Gain

The genre-diverse text component's largest effect size ($d = 1.41$) corroborates the theoretical position of Swales (1990) and Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) that genre knowledge constitutes the foundational competency in ESP reading. When learners internalise the structural and functional conventions of professional genres, they activate top-down processing strategies that substantially reduce the cognitive demands of text interpretation. The consistency of this pattern across all two institutions reinforces the construct validity of genre schema instruction as a discipline-independent mechanism.

Pragmatic Competence in Professional Situational Contexts

Substantial gains in the open-ended situational case component ($d = 1.39$) demonstrate that sociolinguistic instruction successfully extended learners' competence beyond propositional comprehension to pragmatic interpretation – the ability to read professional intent, institutional positioning, and communicative purpose in context. Pre-intervention responses were grammatically adequate but professionally underdeveloped; post-intervention responses exhibited markedly greater register precision and

contextually appropriate communicative reasoning.

Digital Tools and ESP Reading Autonomy

The integration of digital corpus tools in Phase 2, consistent with Alzubi et al.'s (2019) findings on smartphone-mediated autonomous reading development, contributed to cross-institutional score uniformity. Digital access to authentic professional texts offset potential material constraints at regional institutions (Karshi State University and Gulistan State University), enabling all groups to engage with equivalent professional-register input regardless of local resource availability.

Cross-Institutional Consistency and Policy Implications

The absence of significant between-institution variation ($F(2, 183) = 0.41, p = .67$) is the most policy-relevant finding of the study. The programme produced consistent outcomes across institution types (regional, mid-sized, and national flagship), group sizes (16–21), and geographic locations. This scalability profile strongly supports the integration of sociolinguistic ESP reading frameworks into national non-philology English curricula in Uzbekistan.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations constrain the generalisability of these findings. First, the absence of a control group prevents definitive causal attribution; future research should employ a randomised controlled design. Second, participants were drawn exclusively from economics programmes; replication across biology, law, medicine, and engineering

faculties is warranted. Third, the 16-week timeframe precludes conclusions regarding long-term retention of reading gains; longitudinal follow-up studies are needed.

Conclusion

This study offers substantial empirical evidence that a systematically used sociolinguistic approach in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) reading education markedly improves the reading comprehension of non-philology undergraduate economics students. The results indicate considerable and statistically significant improvements in all evaluated components after the 16-week intervention, with especially pronounced effects seen in genre-based text processing and pragmatic interpretation in situational tasks. The findings highlight the essential function of genre schemata and register awareness as crucial cognitive and sociolinguistic mechanisms that enhance the understanding of professional texts. The observed enhancements in reflective monitoring and productive transfer demonstrate that the intervention effectively facilitates the integration of receptive and

productive abilities, hence promoting higher-order communicative competence. The uniformity of results across various institutional settings validates the scalability and contextual flexibility of the suggested instructional strategy. This supports the assertion that sociolinguistic integration in ESP reading teaching is not contingent on context but represents a transferable framework applicable to many higher education environments. Given these findings, it is advisable that ESP curriculum be methodically revised to include explicit genre instruction, sociopragmatic awareness, and reflective learning techniques. Moreover, evaluation frameworks must to be broadened to encompass the multifaceted dimensions of reading proficiency, including pragmatic interpretation and the application of professional discourse. This work presents a theoretically robust and empirically substantiated strategy for enhancing professional reading literacy and communicative competence in ESP situations, with considerable implications for curriculum development and language policy in higher education.

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